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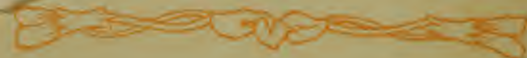
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AH! MY MASTER, — YOU
WHO HAVE TORTURED
THE AGES WITH THE
DELICIOUS PROBLEM OF
PERSONALITY. — WHO
AND WHAT ARE YOU?



IF I SHOULD MEET THE
MASTER!

“I will always observe, and obey, and do His will, and
always call Him ‘Jesus, my Master.’ ”

— GEORGE HERBERT.

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

BY

GEORGE THOMAS SMART

Author of "*Studies in Conduct*," "*The Mystery of
Peace*," "*The Golden Bond*"



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I ON THE WAY TO FIND HIM	1
II SHALL I SPEAK OR LISTEN WHEN I MEET HIM	8
III WOULD HE BE THE CHRIST OF NATURE .	17
IV WHAT WOULD HE SAY OF ME	26
V IS HE AWARE OF SOCIETY	34
VI WHAT DOES HE SAY OF HIMSELF . . .	44
VII WILL HE SHOW ME THE FATHER . .	51

IF I SHOULD MEET THE
MASTER!

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

I

ON THE WAY TO FIND HIM

IT has been hard to find you, O my Master! There are so many ways of missing you. Sometimes I do not see you because you are the sight, and often I do not know you because you are the eternal reason. To meet you is as difficult as to meet myself. You are the *alter ego* of every good man's life.

You are so far away from me in Time. I become faint at heart as I think of the process of the suns since you walked in cloudless Syria. Two thousand years! who shall span them to-day, when even moments are become the stuff of life? It would need a Pharaoh who built to outlast dynasties to stretch his imagination over these twenty hundred years. Three score and ten generations of men have walked the dusty yesterdays since you went up to Jerusalem to begin a nobler race. You

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

are indeed enveloped in the "pathos of distance" and I lose my way in these large circuits of Time.

And the Book is peculiar — the literature peculiar — that affirms your reality and identity. I am taught to esteem it as the Book of books, yet this elevation separates. It is difficult in height of rhetoric, confusing in its manifoldness, oppressive in its weight of personality, humiliating in its revelations of man's weakness. It is the most actual and the most impossible of all the records of men. It describes Vanity Fair and yet lives in a land of dreams. It is *your* book; and this is another wonder; for nowhere else does one great personality so knit together the records of a race.

Is this predominance a dream, or is it a fact? Is it a surpassing loyalty of the evangelists, or an everlasting reality demonstrable by myself? When the men who companioned with you lay down, each in his several way, how you dealt with them, emphasizing in human fashion their preferences in your character, I miss you again. Are you Matthew's Jesus or Mark's? Did Luke

amplify too heroically? Did John philosophize? And Paul—did he apprehend you in one tumultuous moment, catching only a glimpse of your meanings, or did he hit upon your “secret”—the *eternal* secret of your life?

More warily still do I have to tread the road to find you in ecclesiastical life. The Church—*your* Church—has been overzealous to protect you, to defend you; and it has often hidden you in fastnesses whither few could come. I breathed an exotic air as I sought you in the closed gardens of the papacy; my spirit was oppressed, its flights denied. Sometimes I found no sign of you, but merely a *simulacrum* sitting in your place, nay climbing to a place you never sought, and dictating, yes, *dictating*, salvation to men, forcing them to keep a regimental step in belief and works. Then indeed I missed you, and so did others,—Blessed Francis for one, and Wycliffe, and Luther.

Sometimes I lose you, my Master, in the wrecks of old civilizations flooded over your earthly life. The Jerusalem you walked lies five fath-

oms deep below the rubbish of to-day. The city you wept over yet asks the tears of men, for Rachel is still ravished of her children. The "glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome" are the fables of history. Since the Greeks sought you at the feast, or Pilate questioned you, whole races have swept like torrents over your continent and the one adjacent. The memorials of any man's life must needs be cut deep if they last. And some of yours have disappeared forever.

Moreover I fail to find you, my Master, because of the oppositions of race. You do not belong to my blood. My speech was an incoherent babble when you were a Voice crying through the quarters of the earth. My race was in the melting-pot when you were reckoning your ancestry from kings. My present attitude to life, exigently demanded by blood, situation, education, was not dreamed of when you were standing far above the crowd. You are an Oriental, and I am of the Occident. In crossing this estranging sea of race I often lose you.

Thus you are a lonely and silent

figure, my Master, in the crowded streets of to-day. Men say that they see you, and report what you desire, but the message is far from clear. The world is a shining and noisy place, and it is easy to forget your humility. Our gilded youth still drive along the Appian Way. We have Nebuchadnezzars who build great cities, and Cæsars who wait restless at the head of mighty armies. Brother demands of brother, nation of nation, that the inheritance be divided, so that the sea that you never saw is resonant with martial storms. Your philosophy of resignation is a foreign language to most of my fellows to-day, O Master. I hear them say, "I am of Nietzsche and the Superman," or "I am of Ibsen and the real man," or "I stir the primal slime with Zola, or see all life as an infinite jest with Shaw." These men speak to me, my Master, and in my tongue; they live in my world to-day and profess to know its corners. And your voice seems distant and esoteric for the moment while these stertorous breathers dream awake. Forgive me, Jesus my Master, if I do not always find you,

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER !

for the world is fuller of men than it has ever been before, and I lose you in the crowd.

Ah! the fault is mine. The weakness is within. Ought not I to be ashamed of the tyranny of time when I am an immortal spirit? Is not time only a comic category of my thinking? Is the literature that speaks of you so foreign, after all, since the Teuton spirit seized on its morality with a truer insight than any Semitic race has shown, and the Anglo-Saxon genius has worked over its phrases and persons till they are part of a deathless art? Has not the Church, "seated in hearing of a hundred streams," sailed some of them to the source, and has *always* — *somewhere* — kept you in mind? Have the floods of overwashing civilizations obliterated so much, or did not your spirit lay hold of the eternally valid in them and use it in morals, art, and logic until it expressed something of your mind? As to the oppositions of race, what are they, my Master? Is there not a larger family still than my own particular tribe and nation, one where the best life of all nations

belongs equally to each? And may I not forget the noisy servitors of our present day by remembering the messages of "wise passiveness" or heroic trust uttered by more than one immortal singer of the world "evermore about to be"?

Ah! as I said before, the fault is within. But even there I find you. For in the quiet of the hour of meditation all that is best, all that is rarest, all that makes me wish to awaken to-morrow with an inscrutable expectation of finding joy, is of you. My Master, I could not face to-morrow if you had not gone over its hours before me. It is the hope of meeting you in its dreariest moment that keeps me in heartiness, so that I can still discover some midsummer delights.

II

SHALL I SPEAK OR LISTEN WHEN I MEET HIM

MY Master, when I meet you, how shall I approach you? If I get together the momentary essence of all my best living, that will be poor enough. My worthiest self looks pale and ineffectual in the light of your searching gaze. I shrivel up; and yet within the dryness of my soul there is still something that lives for you. Deep calls to deep, and my deeps answer yours, so that, despite the horror of seeing myself shrink to a mere possibility, I can bear the heavenly pain of your scrutiny, for you look to heal, and in your eyes I find some image of my future self.

But shall I listen, or speak, when I meet you, my Master? I must needs listen to you, for words of graciousness fall from your mouth. Men used to be astonished at your speech, and the

amazement is now become a habit. And I, who have a larger knowledge of what you said than any one in the wondering multitudes, surely must listen when you speak. To your nearest familiar in the flesh your words were fragments; they all had to be resolved in the alembic of one personal mind; but to me they are several in emphasis and mutually explanatory up to a certain degree. Yes, — up to a certain degree; — for at the most your words are very few. You neither strive nor cry; you answer not again; you do not seek your own. You are the great Silent One. Yet what you do not say is also necessary to me.

Indeed I must listen to you, but more still I must speak. It is for this I sought you. I know the words you uttered to other individual souls; I also know those that fit the need of “man in widest commonalty spread”; but I long for personal assurances for myself. You spoke home to your day, I need your word for mine.

I must speak — just as I must pray; and all men must pray, for prayer has ever been more voluminous than revela-

tion. The voice of man calling upon God has been a most pertinacious litany. So I shall have much to say to you, my Master, and all the more because I know so little. You do not need to speak to me for you are near to me; but I have need to speak to you because I am so far away.

Thus let me speak to you concerning To-day, — let me try my meanings by the side of yours; for to-day is busy with me, mischievous even, and always big with mystery.

As to Yesterday, I can manage that better. Old problems do not disquiet me. I can almost smile at the heavy miseries of former days and, blind as I am, can easily thread my way through a past that lets in no new thing or person. Looking backward I can be complacent in strange company; I am hardly moved by personal distress, or the clash of cities, or the fall of empires. I see all as a dream. And it is ended. For a moment I am interested, perhaps uneasy, perhaps amused; but afterwards I awake.

And what an awakening! Then indeed I am a troubled sleeper in the cool

inexorable dawn. Fierce voices call me to rise to the double labor of gathering the fruits and sowing the seed. I can handle the harvest of other days more competently, and to-day as the commentary on yesterday is not a hard matter; but to-day as the seed-field of to-morrow is the test of humanity. To-day is already to-morrow because it is unavoidable, seminal, and infinite. The element of newness is what troubles me. I can meet the old requirements, the old temptations (has it not been affirmed that there are only thirty-six tragic situations?); but how am I to meet evil when it keeps changing its disguise? It is Satan in one age, the devil in another, Mephistopheles in another, but what in mine? Job is an example to me; but it is not Satan who comes. I do not know who may come. And it may even chance to be Lilith changed to Circe, or Circe to Helen, or Helen to — ah, if I only knew!

I must speak, too, of the new moralities. Your moralities have the mark of spirituality, they support the deeper foundations or mark out the architecture of the flinty ribs of life, and I

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

am brought up to them and admire, nay, reverence their spring and thrust, and I perceive that like Gothic piers they carry the weight of the entire building. But, my Master, you know my humanity and my subjection to immediate ornament, the convention, the passing show. And so, while falling back on your probing morals when I see deeply, I am yet confused because the envisaging of your insight is not always the envisaging of to-day.

Yes, my Master, there are new moralities growing out of new situations and new instruments of living. The moral code is never completed. It ever grows inward and towards the heart. Thus you gave to Cæsar what belonged to him; but I am asked to declare what it is that he can call his own. You gave away all that you had, but I have wife and children and a ring of poor relations pressing upon my subsistence. I speak with you about these daily matters for they come into the common discourse of men.

And I am not only perplexed with the applications of the moral intention. The intention itself comes into question.

It is not the question as to how many virtues there are, — four cardinal virtues or forty, — nor is it a question as to what is the greatest good; but it is the question, Is there One Eternal Goodness, and does that Goodness finally prevail? There are those who exhort a swifter change in values, affirming that all are social and only worthy as they minister to the greatest number. Others say that all the standards I have accepted are neither instinctive modesties of the soul, nor yet deliverances from heaven, but a social contract agreed upon to preserve common interests. Others still affirm that all standards are outgrown and that yours are only suitable for a slave-morality. And yet again some proclaim your standards and profess to apply them, both as individuals and as nations, all the time seeking their own avaricious ends. Is there One Goodness, my Master? Are morals exchangeable? Is the moral life a social contract merely? Is humility a slave virtue? Is the future only for the “fittest,” and if so, who are they? Is the Christ man to be a Superman? Or

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

is man as a whole a determined mechanism playing back to the cosmic energies merely the physical and instinctive tune?

It all means this, my Master, and never more clearly than when I speak with you: What are the goals of men, and what are mine?

Is it true that they are altogether social, as some assert? I am told that I am a social product, that I was born of the will of society, that my Self is only a name for a congeries of relations reaching out at last to the most distant man; that all the continents furnished me forth and all sustain me; that history throbs in my blood, and all creation speaks in me, and since I am not individual but social, I am to judge everything from this point of view. But I grow cold,—indifferent even. I cannot embrace the Pleiades; I cannot love the unknown “man and brother”; I cannot warm to a neutral “society.” I despise the mob. I would fly away and be at peace with a few familiars. Is this wrong?

On the other hand, I am told that society is an idolatry, the creation of

men who fatten the race in order to feed on it. I am told that though my life was not willed by me, ever since my birth I have been demanding "my own way." As a child I had a "will," as a man I have an inviolable self. As a matter of fact, society gets little of me. I pay it a fraction of my fruits and let it go. I give it a word or two and evade its curious question. I only think of it when, like a sick child, it cries too loud. Essentially I am alone. I have never told any one what I am and what I mean. I never can. When I die the world will get along, for I am so private and individual I shall never be missed. All, then, that I can do is to deepen my own experience and brim up my own delights.

What say you, my Master? Are you a ruler and divider between society and the self? On better thought I cry Nay, and Nay, — I do not ask for a precise answer. I do not mean to quibble. I despise moral pedantry. I am human, and because I am a man you will leave me to work out the answer for myself.

Yet I shall not be alone. You will be with me. When you spoke to my

far-off elders you used parables and often the parable needed explaining. It meant so many deep things. But it always made men more equal to their work. Is not your whole life become a parable to us of a later day, equally full of meaning and multitude, equally verging to the infinite with suggestion, equally, nay overpoweringly, girding men for their tasks? As I companion with you I find that this world is a storehouse of surprise, where God even deigns to play with men, and lays out life so magnanimously that they often lose the way. But there are moments when a vertical shaft of light lies over all the unknown land, and for an instant divination comes, and I am forever made nobler both to suffer and to rejoice. And these moments come while I speak with you.

III

WOULD HE BE THE CHRIST OF NATURE

WHEN you prayed for your disciples, my Master, you did not ask that they should be taken from the world; you asked that they might be kept from the evil that is in the world. This is what I ask to-day.

I do not think that you mean me to leave the world, though I often sound but a dim and perilous way in it; for you, rejecting the ascetic practise, lived in it, and found it to be the world of God, and not the devil. I love the world. It stings me with delight as I watch its natural beauty. And though I am often ashamed to be a man, as I look upon the derelict members of my race, I am still oftener ashamed to be so poor a creature myself when brought face to face with human greatness. History and biography give me a double

blush, — that men are such mischievous creatures, little better than a kind of vermin, as Bacon said, — and that they are so noble. You, my Master, are in both history and biography, and the race should be measured in height as well as in depth.

Ah! my Master, is this love of the world ill? You loved the beauty of the lily, the lush greenness of the grass before it was cast into the oven, the birds in the mustard-branches, the children playing in the market-place, the men and women about their daily tasks. You called the fishermen to you, and welcomed Nathanael, and also saw the better part of the Sycharene. *You* loved the world.

My world, however, is more confusing than yours, my Master. The magnitude of it distresses me. I may chance to love its poorer parts even with the best. I need to be brave to love it wisely.

How large it is compared with yours! I suppose you never walked the shores of the Great Sea; but to me the Great Sea is only a little inlet, for I have sailed the oceans. You trod the streets of

one metropolis, I have lived in several. You touched a few of the powers of nature, but my fellows have harnessed many for me. Daily I am brought close to the geologic ages. Geography is a science that I have only begun in an intensive way, though I roam over a world quadruple the size of yours. Outside of your Syria there were the fumes of a few other nations and the rest was silence; but for me, outside of my own land there are many others and all are known. I throb to the stir of twenty states; my life is cut out for me in a dozen countries, — “The world is too much with us late and soon.” My great need is to keep my own soul; for the distant east and west, north and south, knock at my door momentarily. If you began your ministry now, would you send your disciples to all the world, or would you send them to themselves? I surmise that you would often call them to yourself!

Perhaps I am too insistent on the *fact* of the world; yet I cannot help it if I am honest with my day and my own heart; for the interests of to-day are more cosmic than ever before, and I am

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

a child of to-day. Only a hundred years of serious interest in the cosmic order, but how much has been shown in this time! Poets, who of all men should have been alive to it, until a hundred years ago tempered their admiration with fear. To-day they only *love*.

But the more serious-minded learn. Perhaps they are too serious, for sometimes they speak as though even you had nothing for them, my Master, because you did not deliver cosmic knowledge to men. They ask whether you knew, or cared to tell, how little Moses knew; why you did not declare the origins and processes of nature? "Why did you acquiesce in so childish a cosmology?" they inquire.

This indeed once troubled me. Then I saw that nature is only to be explained through humanity, for human purposes; and that the pressing matter is to see that men treat it wisely, using and not abusing it. Science, indeed, so far as morality is concerned, is a changing play of the intellect, disclosing new wonders of creation and new instruments for men to use; but in all

ages men have the option of moral greatness whatever may be the formulas of natural law they put together. Your formulas are not mine but, oh, that my way of living up to what I know were level with yours!

One thing indeed grows out of the contemporary knowledge, my Master, namely the vast widening of your mission, and the retroactive love of God. In those long twilight ages unnumbered creatures lived and died. Were they without God, and without hope, because you came so late? I trow not. I am bound to believe that the overflowing love of the Father, made clear in you, must have had some surplus for others. The divine Spirit you represent must have lodged with these early men; or else it could not be divine.

Thus, my Master, I rest another case that troubles me, the trouble of the stars, trouble that seems far-fetched as the light that comes from the midnight sky. Yet I cannot forbear. If those worlds are like to ours and worthy of God, they surely have or had some conscious life. Did *you* visit them; or did some other ministry of the

divine? My concern is not that I should communicate with Mars, but that God should. Yet, as I say, I rest my case on human history; for God visited man and this present world, and what is man that he should be mindful of him?

I never enter upon these large matters, my Master, without at last coming upon a great shadow, in whose presence I grow disquieted. I find law in the universe more widely than the men of your day; but I also find a deeper pain, a stranger capriciousness. The creative energy seems to fail so often when it touches the individual, though it succeeds with the type. Death has been prodigal as well as life; pain as well as delight. And I am driven to feel for the individual and to forget the type. Yes, my Master, even you summed up this fact as none other. What do you say to this, — Does God forsake his creatures in their hour of agony, or does he receive their spirits? In short, do we suffer alone, or does he suffer with us? Ah, if only the cosmic struggle is to be finally worked out as a spiritual victory; but for it to end thus

God must be more than an observer. He must be in the very thick of it, mean it to be a struggle, and yet mean final victory too. My Master, I stop my mouth with dust, for you entered the struggle and were worsted, and you were the Only Begotten, and you did the Father's will. Then I can enter it too.

A more immediate question, my Master, is, What are the rights and duties of man towards the natural world he lives in? He seems to be within his privilege as he cuts the grass and casts it into the oven; for grass will grow again, and the cattle upon the hills need provender. But he cuts down the forests, and the rain washes the face of the earth till it shines with a stony smile, and no more forests glorify Lebanon, no more vintages climb the mountain slopes. Or he digs deep into the earth and rifles the treasure of ages. What are his rights and duties here? He seems to sin against God in despoiling the earth of its beauty; he seems to sin against posterity by robbing it of garnered wealth, yet he must *live*. Oh, that he might

live as you lived, that he might move forward from fear to utility and from utility to reverence. I hear a word of yours, imprisoned in monastic archives until yesterday, that speaks to my conscience: "Cleave the wood and I am there, split the stone and I am there." I do not wonder that Francis of Assisi called fire "Brother Fire." He, at least, in a naughty world, was a candle shining clear.

And this world's end, my Master, what of it? One man claims you as his warrant when he conceives the end of the world in time. He says the time is not far away. He pictures your descent from the clouds as the painter of the Sistine drew it. He thinks of you as sifting the wheat and burning the chaff. To be just to him he does not care about the world, but he cares about the men in it, hence he persuades them to flee from the wrath to come. So inevitable is this apocalyptic state of mind for men that even men of science sometimes speak of *devolution* as the end of *evolution*. But this surely is not your conception, my Master. If you came quietly at first, and come quietly

now, why not always? And would an order *smitten* out of disorder, or imposed imperially on a refractory world, remain order very long? History and morals affirm this rather to be the last dread disorder.

Other men, of whom I am one, my Master, think of the end of the world in terms of purpose. I do not ask when it shall end, but I do ask what it should grow to. I live in futurity; I can see "improvements" to be made. I feel the subtle pressure of posterity, of nations yet to be, of a coming race of whom my Master is the first begotten. And I can trust the world to them, for you will be their light as you have been mine.

Yes, my Master, you are the cosmic Christ. I do not know whether you made the world or not, I do not care, but I do know that the other creation, which is explanation, is absolutely yours. For I only understand my relation to universal life both in duty and in privilege, as I keep close to your universal moralities, and am filled by the dynamic of your spiritual insight.

IV

WHAT WOULD HE SAY OF ME

AS I ponder the appeal you made to the early disciples, O Master, I feel the imperative of your speech and the unity of the response. I see you meeting the Self of man, and I perceive that you win, while the human self loses, to find a larger self, more sensitive and complicated, but also more splendid.

Yet when *I* meet you, my Master, though aware of the royalty of your life and the directness of your voice, I do not feel that I can answer quite as unreservedly as the men of a simpler age. You call with the old love; but I listen with the new adjuncts.

And those adjuncts reach out far and penetrate deep. For I am not a simple Self. I see and know myself as compounded of other times; and even though I would willingly forget this usurpation of history for a moment, I

cannot. I also reckon myself a man of to-day with a place in the scheme of nature and society largely determined for me, with activities also preordained. At the same time I know myself as a set of motives and instincts and vagrant longings, so that the innermost chamber of my heart is often a cage where the primal energies strive for the mastery.

I should like to enter into the happy irresponsibility of the patriarchs as they chose by lot whither they should walk. I should be glad to live for a time in that other age when immediately on the word of invitation men left their nets and followed you. But I have come to another style of life, no longer simple, no longer sudden in its shifts of human destiny. A place once vacated can hardly be found again. If I should outwardly respond to the noblest call too quickly, I might drag with me some who were unwilling to come. This means that I touch a critical age. Your age was captious, suggesting unreasonable options; but mine is critical and offers alternatives that look to be rational. The emphasis has indeed changed. With me it is not always

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

light struggling against darkness, but a veiled sky with esthetic delights against the clear precision of noonday. It is the better against the best.

Even so, I cannot escape the earlier, nay, the aboriginal temptations. I have the perennial threefold difficulty that fronts every generation, though with vastly differing pressure on the several parts according to the man and the age.

One of these temptations is that of the flesh, for I am of the same tissue with my fellows. We do not now speak so openly as the elders, who had stouter hearts and stronger appetites than we admit to-day, and yet the fact remains. In the noblest men there are primal needs and passions that have much to do with the continuance of the race and the structure of society. They also have much to do with its miseries. Am I to be ascetic and deny the body entirely, calling it with Francis, "Brother Ass"? Am I to refrain because another misadventures in his using of a rare and delicate instrument? O my Master, there are earthly harvest-fields that spread before me a beauty provocative of hunger, vintages that set hot and

rebellious blood afire, and personal beauty that in all ages has had a fierce and arduous history. These are in truth desperate seas on which men roam; but should they rot upon the shore afraid to venture? Is my stumbling, even foundering, worse than the pallid fear that makes the ascetic entirely forego permissible pleasures? Surely you have known the glad physical exhilaration of wind and weather on the mountain-side; and I gather that you did not entirely reject the goods of the harvest, for you spoke of the fruits and the wine. But that other temptation, — the one that overcame David, and spoiled many a royal dynasty, that launched the ships of Troy, and even drove cool scholastics like Abelard on the rocks, — the fatal gift of beauty, — do you quite understand what serious business my fellows and I are engaged in? I think you do, for while you carried the Mosaic morals to a more probing depth than any earlier commentator, your spirit in the heart of some unknown disciple interpolated a lovely parable of mercy in the Gospel of John.

As to the second difficulty, my Master, you know it as certainly as I, though the temptation has new matter to-day. This temptation is the rational one. I never cease to thank you, my Master, that you were the liberator of men's minds; that you looked undismayed upon the most forbidding object; that you refused to be cajoled or compelled into accepting venerable opinions. You, if any one, fought for mental freedom; you insisted on seeking the thing-in-itself in a deeper way than post-Kantian metaphysics sought it. My blood indeed stirs as I read your dissection of the solemn folly proposed by the moral tyrants of your day.

And I need this exhilaration. For when I try to see the thing as it is, — and above all, yourself as you are, — those of my contemporaries who are lineal descendants of the scribes often affirm that *you* are against me, and that I am irreverent to you in seeking out the reality and meaning of things. Shall I go with the crowd, side with the majority, ally myself with the noisily orthodox, delight in the slow stupefactions of middle life, or shall

I keep "incorrigibly young"? Sometimes, when looking for you alone and in little frequented places, overcome by the awful sense of isolation, I have wondered whether I should not go with the multitude who keep religion as a holiday and traverse the wide and sunny streets; but then I have suspected that they did not find you, and I *must* find you, my Master; indeed I do, while I tell you of the hot-footed followers of my way. In all my seeking I would do you no irreverence, O Master, for you are heart of my heart, and reason of my reason, the Word made flesh. Yet I would turn the flesh again into the eternal Word. In all my reasoning keep me in elemental Life!

Once more, my Master, I am a man of faith. I live by faith, as all men do, and not by sight. I cannot see a day before me. At a mile distance the object is blurred. To-morrow I do not see at all, yesterday I *think* I see, but often my vision needs revising. It takes faith to live, to work, to pray, to hope,—to *have* faith. This present search of mine was begotten in faith. If it shall end in finding a more blessed

life, the finding must be planted again in faith.

But what am I to believe, my Master? Some have said I must accept the slow deposit of earlier generations latterly become hardened into dogmas; others have said I must be loyal to doctrines delivered to the saints out of the Scriptures. I can accept neither. Just as my life is an uncharted way, never traversed by another, so my doctrines, if they are vitally mine, must be found by myself. Am I right, or wrong, when I feel that I can only have faith in life, and that though life throws off doctrines as explanations, life is the important thing? And in like manner, is it not true that life, to be believed in, need not be talked about so much as lived?

You see, my Master, where I have come. I come to *you*! For I hear you saying, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." I also hear you say: "Life comes quietly, unexpectedly, mysteriously. It is long before it can give an account of itself, and its doctrines need revision not only in each age, but by each

person. The test of it is that it creates more life. Faith is only faith when it works, — whatever the works may need to be, — sometimes indeed the greatest work is to revive itself, and always it lives when its life is the fount and reason for other life.” Surely, my Master, it must be this energy of things that shall correlate all my reasoning, and no less keep in subjection the sins of the flesh!

V

IS HE AWARE OF SOCIETY

AH, my Master, the Self that appears so simple, as long as I do not look at it but blindly follow its instinctive demands, turns out to be vastly complex. In my deepest interior motion I touch the extremest borders of humanity. I do not live, I do not die, to myself.

I cannot help this complication, my Master; for society to-day is neither as exclusive nor invertebrate as it was in your day, when the rigid aristocracy of morals spoke too much, and the flowing tide of humanity spoke not at all. You were the first "advocate of the absent" in this newer age as you uttered the wordless longings of men.

But to-day the wordless masses no longer exist. They have their champions, their philanthropists, their philosophers, who are engaged in putting their case to the other half of the world,

and often sowing in them a bitter and vain discontent. There are many friends of men to-day self-proposed, and perhaps self-seeking. How can I forget society when it shouts at me with the voice of Bashan? I am daily reminded of my identity with men, and my duty to them, by these prophets of the present time.

What is more, my Master, the multitudes have now found a voice themselves. The music of humanity is no longer still or sad; it is noisy and imperious, as the shouts of an army with banners. Society now *demand*s from me a reason for payment, a reason for action, nay, a reason for existence. Formerly it charged headlong only upon thrones; now it charges upon me as an individual. It asks, "Why standest thou here?" The world no longer admits that it owes me a living; it says that I owe it a reason. And I cannot escape its scrutiny. It preaches at me on the public streets from improvised pulpits; it contemptuously shouts down my academic sense in the daily press. It pushes brutally aside the sense of fineness, of distinction, of the

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

enlarging reverences of former times. It is too earnest for its "rights," too insistent on its "wages" to care for me. I cannot dig, and so it scorns me; I cannot reap, and so it counts me a parasite. It refuses to consider the goods that I try to deal in.

Should I then, my Master, throw up my place and gains, and join society in seeking I know not what? Sometimes the vision of yourself overcomes me, — you, my Master, who had no place, no reward; sometimes the story of the Blessed Francis speaks to me, and I would go forth again as he did and owe no man anything but love. But would society accept me if I came thus empty-handed? And what right have I to tear the kindly web of relations that has been woven about me? I did not seek my present place; no one seeks his actually present condition, he would always have it better, freer, more to his ideal pattern, and yet I am here, and powerless to move. To step out, as society asks, would be a treachery against society. Society does not know itself, — its own history and longings. I sometimes get a momentary glimpse

of its first building; I perceive how painful is the discipline that keeps it together; and I know that it is far from a concluded good. I am also sure that society often becomes blindly selfish in its extreme demands. I cannot give all,—at least I cannot give it in the way that society asks.

Am I not right, my Master? Did you not flee from the multitudes into desert places; did you not cross the little sea to escape importunity; did you not pass through the midst of the crowd? Did you always do and say what society demanded? Did you give to society the last residual throb of yourself?

If you did, my Master, you were not the transcendent one I have believed you. Infinity, personality, surely never can give itself entirely away! So I answer back the demand of society by pointing to you who gave *more* than society asked but *in another way*. You did not do what some men asked. You did not tell what others wished to hear.

Nor have I, nor shall I; for I know in my largest moments that personality is the choicest thing, and not produc-

tivity. My aider is not so necessary to me as my abettor. My paramount duty is the deepening of the springs of my own life so that out of these refreshing may come. I see that in former times the most needed men were the useless men,—men that society rejected,—and perhaps even I, useless as I know myself to be, am yet needed by my age after all.

I think I see, my Master, how you would deal with these high demands of society. I believe you would be less sharp with these conclusions than you were with the dull proposals of the Pharisees. I am sure you would be kind as you guided the stumbling thoughts of men. But you would win men by a love that withheld as well as gave; you would say that as for production there is also the bread of wisdom; and that so much talk about reward argued little joy in labor and little in life. For you tell me that each day is to be a place of delight, and that abundant life, the joy of living, is a necessary and real good for any man or society worthy of the name.

Yet I am troubled at times about my

payment. Deep in my heart I ask the reason why I have so much and others so little. I wondered yesterday when a poor woman thought my dwelling spacious, though humble enough, and my way of living beyond her furthest dream. I said to myself, and truly, that I had foregone delights to live laborious days in youth; that I had even known hunger and thirst so that I might eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, while she had been the sport of circumstance, marrying early, and ever since supporting a numerous family and a weak Debility whom she called Husband. But even then, suppose ambition spurred me and not her, how came my entrance into a social region *charged* with these dynamic powers, and hers into one so weakening? At the end of my questioning I always come upon this, that the "start" of my life was not my own but a free gift, freighted with more goods than some of my fellows have, or can have.

But what shall I do with this surplus payment? Has society a right to stand at my door and dun me for it? Ought I to pay it all back?

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

After all I have very little of it. Every decent man gets little but sustenance and a few esthetic and other joys that make none the poorer for his having, but the world far richer. I spend less on myself than the clerk or laborer. I clothe myself better, but also more cheaply than the negro porter who keeps the apartment. I watch the spending of money more closely than he; for I have a sense of responsibility that stands over me demanding the accounting of every penny. I do not take credit for this; I do not justify myself; I am only trying to see my way. Though society does not know it, I am denied more rigorously than the demander itself; for I want the rare and difficult things, and these are become daily necessities. "Give me this day my daily book," is a harder prayer to achieve than if it were daily bread. When I follow you, my Master, it is dignity, largeness, beauty, knowledge, worship that I strive after, and these require instruments neither cheap nor common in the day I live in.

In one thing I admit extravagance. Education takes a large part of my in-

come and soon will take more than I receive. Should I educate my own thus expensively, or spread the worth over society? Could not my children cut down their style and equipage so that others might have a chance? But the question arises, Is it wise to put a youth accustomed to some dignity upon a bare subsistence? Would his after-life be better or worse for himself and society? My Master, I do not know. But I seem obliged by the noblest examples and emotions to care for mine own else I were worse than a barbarian. And though I, standing towards youth in the place of Providence, exact a daily denial, I still lean to mercy and liberality.

Sometimes when pressed too brutally, and beaten with economic weapons too hardly, I turn demander, and facing society say that my way is not an easy one to follow. My place, my position, has its own hardships. Often indeed do I long for some simple village dwelling with no "conveniences," and also no social exactions. Dear to me would be the wide maple-shaded street, the unaffected neighborly interest, the more

than sabbath stillness of an unambitious life. But if I chose thus I should be a heavier burden on my fellows. I cannot, I cannot! My place is mine and none other's. My home has ever something of the prison. My freest flight must needs have a return.

What then, my Master? Is it not this, that life never can be settled out of hand, nor can the problem of society be answered at a stroke? I must daily smooth the roughness, daily try to answer the Sphinx, daily thread my way through the briers. If I could smite society and the self into a perfect and immovable equilibrium, would it still be life, or would it be death? Life itself, society, with the contingent issues daily growing out of them, are my disciplines. My cross is one that I lift day by day. If I should fly to the uttermost ends of the earth society would be there to face me, for *I* am society myself; if I should try to lose my own individuality in the greatest crowd, again I could not for the self is at its heart. My security is ever disturbed by touches of transporting fear,

IS HE AWARE OF SOCIETY

my fears ever dissipated by heavenly insights.

Ah, my Master, already I am stronger to see and to do because I have been with you and talked a little by the way!

VI

WHAT DOES HE SAY OF HIMSELF

WHY should I try to seek you above all others, my Master? Why do I take you as the test and valuation of my life and the life of the world? Why should I bare my heart to you? Behind all my soul's babble there is an unquiet wonder that gives rise to questions which show themselves uneasily like dark birds athwart a summer sky. I wish the heavens to be at peace, but these silent travelers bring news of storm. I cannot shut my eyes, nor can I close my ears. No monastic seclusion, no index of forbidden books, will keep down the momentous question, What *are* you, my Master?

Are you simply the sum of every good memory, — the energetic dream of a final man, once visionary in the world of fact, but now a blessed fixture in the world of ideality? Are you a good

man, the best man that ever lived, — or more, — or less?

All ages have claimed you, I know, but was this due to your limits or to your largeness? I suspect that no generation espouses any man unless he has the marks of the day upon him, and to be marked may mean to be less than what is possible, to sign away, as it were, the potency of the undetermined. Or are you so far removed from the known and natural that you are another mystery to men, tantalizing them, distressing them, parading in their clothes while needing no cloak for your greatness, professing to play the game as they play it, yet all the time with infinite powers to help you? Did you really not know that the fig-tree was fruitless? Did you need to learn as patiently as I? Were you actually tempted of Satan with no little door of flight into divinity left open? And was that cry of loneliness on the cross merely a cryptic utterance calculated beforehand to mystify, or was it pure escaping humanity? Are you man, man at the highest because also subject to the lowest, but victori-

ous; or are you God, the Deity, the Absolute to whom the words of these my colloquies are frightful irreverences, though my heart means them to be far other?

Ah! my Master, — you who have tortured the ages with the delicious problem of personality, — who and what are you?

I am aware that many of my fellows have made up their minds conclusively. They have built chantries and put you there forever, and then they have closed them, secure in mind, to go about the tasks of life in a steady, trampling way. Others have argued the case pro and con for generations, at last reaching some statement about you that left you merely a formula. Others have told me what you said you were, though often they knew not the slightest of rhetoric or figure, or the wealth of the Orient, or the fragmentary insights of the mystic mood. Some have pointed to what you did and how the very heavens were subject to you. Many have concerned themselves with how you came to be, prying with almost a prurient imagination into the least

significant moments of your life, implicating others in superhumanity, or else thrusting them into the region of shame.

I cannot make up my mind thus conclusively. I do not know *what* you are. I only know *who* you are. As I try to understand you I see you through the parable of myself, — the only parable that can answer with any security. And I do not know what *I* am. I do not know what personality is; and the greater the personality the less I know. I sometimes dare to hope that you do not know what you are, that God does not know what he is, that ever more and more divine surprises await him, await you, await me also as a seeker after you and a child of the Eternal One.

Often, my Master, you seem to be careless yourself of all these searching questions of men. You never told them absolutely what you were; you always left something wanting. There is a noble carelessness about your attitude to yourself. And I am glad that you do not much concern yourself with these matters; for I feel in my heart that the

what always disturbs the *who* when it grows analytic. I would not question as much as I do about myself, — I would live more freely, objectively, simply — even as a little child. And you, my Master, often speak of yourself in the impersonal, objective, and eternal terms of childhood. Surely you are the eternal *Son*, — the eternal Child.

Thus, though I may not know you, my Master, in substantive fashion, I can know you far better; for you spoke about the deepest part of any one of us, the *intention*. I may never know, even care to know what you *are*; but I can always know what you *mean*.

I am sure you mean to be yourself, and not the creature of any sect or school. You are neither the preexistent Christ, the historical Christ, the experiential Christ, or any other Christ, — you are all and more. You do not intend to be cajoled into any system or caste. You are the sovereign and universal man. There are twelve hours in every one of your days, and the hour has not yet come for many of your labors. You stand equally unmoved amid the crowd or on the peak

of isolation. You keep your way bathing no jot of heart or hope.

Ah! what an inspiration for me; for it is hard for one poor soul to withstand the whole world. In the strength of your invitation to learn of you, and in the substance of personal experience, there are moments when I could face anything, do anything, be anything; for you have taught me your secret of sweet reasonableness and that other greater secret of the armed vision through which I see him who is invisible save to the inward eye.

I am sure, too, that you mean something in respect to me. I call you Master, Lord, Saviour,—all the dearest names of earth have been given you; for you loved men and love them now, and they must needs answer. I know you would love me and save me. I know that you lift me up out of the miry clay and release me from the mesh of passion and endow me with spiritual energy. I recognize the throb of your heart in mine; and in all history I perceive that you are *cor cordium*, heart of hearts, embosomed in the last sanctuary of life. Often and often

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER !

I am urged on beyond the prudential borders of life and I know you are there. Sometimes I mount to the seats of the mighty and I know you urged me on. Whatever I see, or feel, or know that makes life more sweet and solemn, and myself more pure, I am sure that you are in the midst of it all. *What* are you? Again I say I do not know; but you are my furthest vision, my truest heart, my deepest life, my *Master*.

Still again I know something of your meaning about God. You did his will, you entered his love. These two things are enough. So you became a great force and energy both of detent and action, letting loose in the world the life of God. Men uninstructed by you felt the pressure of God's will and sought to interpret it all in one piece regardless of his love; or they presumed on his free grace and lived like beasts with lower pleasures and lower pains. You joined law and love; and the joining came through life. *What* are you? I do not know. *Who* are you? You are the Life of the World.

VII

WILL HE SHOW ME THE FATHER

AND now, my Master, I come to the last implication of your life.

You never seem to be individual and separate. You have woven yourself into the strands of being. Existence seems to center itself in you. Behind your personal life, historic and recorded, there lie the spiritual backgrounds. You come trailing clouds of glory about you from the heaven which is your home. Below your daily ministries there surges the passion of the Infinite. You never speak from yourself; you never live by yourself; you are always reenforced by something beyond the dream of man. You have the golden deposit of utter spirituality. You speak of God the Father. Show him to me, I pray, my Master; for unless I find him I lose myself, and I am not absolutely sure of you.

I need to see him beyond a peradventure; for many to-day affirm that he does not exist. These I see trampling brutally forward, breaking down the defenses set about holy things by the piety of ages. Some say that you are a fiction of designing men, that the world is for him who can cow it, that the best philosophy is "a book of verses underneath the bough, a jug of wine," and some fleshly beauty to distract from serious thought. Men eat and drink, they post o'er land or ocean, and when the headlong pace is ended, and the hour of reckoning comes, they do not deem it moral requital so much as the blind buffeting of chance. Looking over life with a hard, worldly stare they say that God does not care for his own, for the seed of the good man often begs daily bread, while they themselves spread like green bay trees. Sometimes, my Master, in the sudden tumults of life, when I am tired and shaken, I too wonder whether God exists. Nay, do not condemn me, my Master! for this is the crucial question of the day. How can he exist and show himself so little? Has not one great,

tragic voice cried out, "He *does* nothing"? Ah, I need your word to establish me. When I hear you I am secure. Speak to me, my Master!

At the other extreme men tell me that God exists too much, so that I am crowded into a prison cell in order that he may walk more freely in his great garden in the cool of the day. These do not call him God, they speak of him with veiled directness as force or energy, and they show by an overpowering multitude of "facts" that God is busy doing so much, — too much, — that he has no time to care. They point to the star-fire and the slow evolutionary processes. They say that all life is struggle and labor, and that poppy-fields are as red with conquest as Norman battle-grounds. They tell me that I am inevitable in my coming, inevitable in my present being, and inevitable in my going hence. They live in geologic periods, think in evolutionary cycles, and write all things down in an epitaph — "It is ordained." Meanwhile, my Master, I am lost! I am overwhelmed by these billows of energy that go over me. Can the un-

moved mover of all this think of me? In the universal life I am less than an atom, less than a vagrant wish; surely the world Architect must needs forget me in the mighty procession of his plans. I am but the dust in the balance, or the mote dancing in the shaft of light that impales a cathedral window. God will forget me! He *seems* to forget me in many a sore and travailing moment. Does he, my Master?

There are others who confuse me still more as they try to tell me about God,—more even than the strict naturalists who at least have a consistent scheme. These are the redundant naturalists who affirm that indeed God has not forgotten me. He remembers me altogether too well. He tipped the scale of being at my birth; he pushes and shoves circumstance every moment as a juggler throws balls,—if he did not thus endlessly play with me I should disappear. He invites, exhorts, rebukes, chastens, and even damns. He knows my private thought, my secret sin. And he will see that I do not escape. My Master, I cannot bear this peeping God of extreme supernaturalism. I

wish to be let alone, save as I choose to be with God. I had rather be a creature of chance than be crushed with destiny. Sometimes in an agony of revolt against this irrational world I stand up and defy the hobgoblin that these men call God. Am I right, my Master?

Nor do I get much warmth out of scholastic conceptions of God. They are too many, too diverse, and too subtle. Above all, they are too emasculate. I do not want a God of transcendence who sits far beyond the fever of life watching all creation with an impartial eye. I want love, I need leading, I must have light. Nor can I grow warm to a God who has deputed the gravest mysteries of life to a self-registering Church that turns out pardon with business exactitude and gives an increment of "merit" for an outward observance. Sometimes, even, I am not satisfied with the immanent God who is offered to me to-day; for I do still wish to have some panoply of righteousness, some enveloping action of love, to fall back upon beyond myself as the final force with which to

overcome evil. Ah, my Master, were you theological? — are you now, in these academic senses? I think not. For your concepts *stand*, and they stand not because they are lapidary and rigid, but because they are human, religious, — and fluid.

How different the God of your contemporaries in the flesh, from what I dimly see to be your God! He was thought to be Exactitude and Parsimony combined, the ruler of a little province, with a depleted exchequer, who put on men the heartless tyrannies of the tax-gatherer. And how different God in his reality must be from the humanistic notions that are abroad to-day! God has been made too human. This was the error of Greece with its “nodding” Jove, and its mythology that, spite of a parabolic glory, has some fearful addenda of shamelessness. It is the error of those who even now would worship the aboriginal instincts in themselves and call these by the transcendent name. Even when I walk the way of piety, and sit with contemplation as with a bride, and try in mystic schools to see God, I fail; for

I cannot hold myself to be most divine when most irrational, nor can I think that God is waiting for men to swoon before he shows them the glory of his passing garments.

My Master, you did not think of God as idle and absentee, — as irrevocable energy, — as chance, — as a tyrant postulate, — as an emasculate formula! Was he not your Father? — and is he not mine? Did you not come to show him to men and to me? And if he is your Father and my Father, must I not see him through the nobler human emotions and intentions, — through yours? Then I shall see him as becoming, striving, about to be, in greater and deeper ways than ever before. If your life was tragic, is not his? If you were willing to be given, did he not give? If you suffered, does not he? If he does not know the last agonies of human experience, is he truly a God for me, and can he be a Father to me?

When I ask these questions, my Master, I seem to touch the shores of mortality and make ready to voyage over an infinite sea. I am thrown far back in time, — so far that my mind

reels as I weakly spell the story of the eons; I plunge so deep that I can hardly recover. But however far back I go the final question always awaits me: Whence did evil come and what is its sinister meaning? Why did not God keep it out of the world? Is it necessary, and if so, is not its necessity a part of the nature of God? I console myself with thoughts of a later phase of life, when evil shall be seen to have ministered to good, and the salvation of man made more secure, and the glory of God made clearer; but I am pricked to the heart as I feel that evil is essentially a bad will. And how came bad wills in a world that is the sole creation of a will omnipotently good?

Ah! I do not know. I can only tread a hazardous way. But one dream comforts me, — nay, more, gives me an exaltation of spirit that makes me sing together with the morning stars, — that my Father and your Father is struggling and striving too, and that when I struggle against evil I am then most Godlike and most a forwarder of God's unknown though not unguessed ends. You struggled, and you were

the only begotten of the Father. I struggle, and I am one of the many begotten of the Father. Is it possible that the Father does not struggle too?

And if he struggles, I am saved from sadness. For I do not struggle unless I have hope of victory, — a *chance*, though it may be a bare one. Would the Father struggle if he did not have a chance of victory too? And is it not likely that to his infinite view the chance is changed to a certainty? If as a struggler he is blind, or hopeless, or uncertain, he cannot be my Father; he would not be worthy even to be man's Son.

No, the Father, though he struggles, is not blind, nor hopeless, nor uncertain. I discern spots of conquered territory, places where the desert blossoms, hearts that are full of joy. This goodly frame of the earth, with its myriad life and color, is one testimony of victory. The world of high imagination bequeathed to men is another. And the nobler structure of the related ideals of life that has grown out of the primeval slime into a true fastness for men's longings is still another. Above all,

IF I SHOULD MEET THE MASTER!

my Master, the Father is *your* Father. He could not be your Father if he did not finally win. You won, my Master; and I cannot go far wrong when I posit you as the true answer to all my questioning about the spiritual issues and returns of life.



AHI MY MASTER. — YOU
WHO HAVE TORTURED
THE AGES WITH THE
DELICIOUS PROBLEM OF
PERSONALITY. — WHO
AND WHAT ARE YOU?



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